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Cooperation between the United Nations and regional and other organizations

Cooperation between the United Nations and the Organization of the Islamic Conference

Report of the Secretary-General**

Summary

The present annual report of the Secretary-General reviews the cooperation between the United Nations system and the Organization of the Islamic Conference, including their respective specialized agencies and programmes, for the period from July 2001 to August 2002. It highlights the convening of the general meeting between the United Nations system and the Organization of the Islamic Conference and its specialized institutions held in Vienna in July 2002.

* A/57/150.

** The present report is being submitted on 11 September 2002, in order to include all contributions from the United Nations system.

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I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to paragraph 13 of General Assembly resolution 56/47 of 7 December 2001.

II. Consultations between representatives of the United Nations and the Organization of the Islamic Conference and representation at meetings

2. Consultations between the United Nations and the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) at different levels on political, economic, social, humanitarian and other matters continued throughout the reporting period. Such pressing issues as combating terrorism, and the situations in Afghanistan and the Middle East were regularly addressed. The two organizations also sought to better coordinate their efforts in conflict prevention and peacemaking. The Department of Political Affairs and the Office of the Permanent Observer for the Organization of the Islamic Conference to the United Nations maintained regular working contacts on issues of mutual concern to the two organizations.

3. The ninth Extraordinary Session of the Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers was held in Doha on 10 October 2001 to discuss the repercussions of the events that had taken place in the United States of America and their effects worldwide. The Ministers, among other things, strongly condemned the terrorist acts of 11 September 2001; reaffirmed that those brutal acts ran counter to the teachings of the divine religions, as well as ethical and human values; and expressed their condolences to and sympathy for the people and Government of the United States and the families of the victims. The Secretary-General's Special Adviser on Africa represented the Secretary-General at the meeting and made a statement on his behalf.

4. On 15 November 2001, the Ministers for Foreign Affairs of the States members of the Organization of the Islamic Conference held their annual coordinating meeting at United Nations Headquarters. The meeting discussed the agenda of the fifty-sixth session of the General Assembly and the international political situation, in particular those items of concern and interest to the Organization of the Islamic Conference. The coordinating meeting confirmed the position adopted by the ninth Extraordinary Session of the Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers on the issue of international terrorism. Other issues reviewed were: the Middle East and the question of Palestine, including the issue of Al-Quds Al-Sharif; the situations in Afghanistan, Cyprus, Comoros, Sierra Leone and Somalia, as well as the situation in Jammu and Kashmir. The topics of United Nations reform and expansion of the Security Council were also discussed. The Secretary-General's Special Representative for Afghanistan, addressed the meeting on behalf of the Secretary-General.

5. The OIC convened the tenth Extraordinary Session of the Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers to discuss the situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory on 10 December 2001 in Doha. The Deputy United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process participated in the conference as an observer.

6. Furthermore, the Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs represented the Secretary-General at the twenty-ninth session of the Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers, which was convened by OIC in Khartoum from 25 to 27 June 2002.

7. The OIC participated in a working-level meeting, held in New York from 30 April to 2 May 2002, in follow-up to the fourth high-level meeting between the Secretary-General and heads of regional organizations. The main purpose of the meeting was to develop practical cooperation in the fields of conflict prevention and peace-building. A bilateral meeting between representatives of OIC and the United Nations Secretariat was also held at that time. Participants discussed capacity-building for the OIC secretariat and a number of other relevant issues of mutual concern, including cooperation in the area of peacekeeping.

III. General meeting between the United Nations system and the Organization of the Islamic Conference and its specialized institutions

8. Pursuant to General Assembly resolution 56/47 of 7 December 2001, a general meeting on cooperation

between representatives of the United Nations system and OIC and its specialized institutions was held at the United Nations Office at Vienna from 9 to 11 July 2002. Substantive preparations for that meeting were initiated by the coordinating secretariats of the United Nations and OIC. In accordance with the agreement between the two secretariats, the meeting adopted the following agenda at its opening session:

1. Organization of work.
2. Review of cooperation in the political dimension.
3. Review of cooperation and appraisal of progress achieved in priority areas of cooperation:
   (a) Development of science and technology;
   (b) Trade and development;
   (c) Technical cooperation among Islamic countries;
   (d) Assistance to refugees;
   (e) Food security and agriculture;
   (f) Education and eradication of illiteracy;
   (g) Investment mechanisms and joint ventures;
   (h) Human resources development;
   (i) Environment/health and population;
   (j) Development of arts and crafts and promotion of heritage.
4. Consideration of proposals for enhancing the mechanisms of cooperation between the United Nations system and the Organization of the Islamic Conference and its institutions.
5. Other matters.
6. Adoption of the final report.

9. The meeting had before it working papers prepared by participating agencies, programmes and institutions of the two organizations. The ten issues listed under agenda item 3 of the general meeting, entitled "Review of cooperation and appraisal of progress achieved in priority areas of cooperation", constitute the agreed priority areas of cooperation between the United Nations system and OIC and its specialized agencies. During the meeting, informal working groups composed of representatives of the United Nations system and OIC and its specialized institutions were established. The conclusions and recommendations of the meeting were contained in its final report, which was unanimously adopted on 11 July 2002.

10. The participating representatives of both organizations recognized the importance of mutual cooperation and the usefulness of their general meetings for systematic review of the cooperation and the establishment of new contacts. They recalled the conclusions reached by the two secretariats at the joint working-level meeting between the United Nations and regional organizations held in New York from 30 April to 2 May 2002, with regard to the 13 modalities of cooperation in the fields of security, peace-building and conflict prevention. It was agreed that, as cooperation expands, new areas of interaction might be considered, without prejudice to the current ten priorities. Possible future areas of cooperation would include: dialogue among cultures and civilizations; human rights; disarmament; and drug control and crime prevention. It was agreed that the United Nations and OIC would undertake a review of the areas of cooperation at the next general meeting.

11. Representatives of the following departments of the United Nations and other organizations and agencies of the United Nations system participated in the meeting: Department of Political Affairs; the Department for Disarmament Affairs; Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), on behalf of all regional commissions; secretariat of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD); Office for Drug Control and Crime Prevention; United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP); United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA); Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR); World Food Programme (WFP); Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR); Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO); United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO); International Telecommunication Union (ITU); World Meteorological Organization (WMO); International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD); and the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO). Representatives of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human

Rights and the Department for Disarmament Affairs took part in the general meeting for the first time.

12. Representatives of the following organizations and institutions of OIC participated in the meeting: the OIC General Secretariat; Islamic Centre for Development of Trade; Statistical, Economic and Social Research and Training Centre for Islamic Countries; Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization; Islamic University of Technology; Research Centre for Islamic History, Art and Culture; Islamic Development Bank; Islamic Chamber of Commerce and Industry; and Islamic Corporation for the Insurance of Investment and Export Credit.

IV. Follow-up action on recommendations of the meetings between the United Nations system and the Organization of the Islamic Conference, including cooperation in the field of economic and social development

13. Outlined below is a summary of contributions received for this report from the United Nations system. It relates to joint activities and/or programmes implemented in cooperation with institutions of OIC.

A. Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia

14. During the period under review, the cooperation activities between ESCWA and OIC were concentrated in the field of World Trade Organization issues; trade and development; transport; communications and computer networking; statistics; and natural resources.

15. The Islamic Development Bank was one of the Commission's more important partners, not excluding cooperation with the Statistical, Economic and Social Research Training Centre for Islamic Countries, a subsidiary organ, and the Organization of Islamic Capitals and Cities, an affiliated institution. Technical cooperation activities included advisory services, training activities and participation in meetings.

16. Currently, ESCWA, with the support of the Islamic Development Bank, is conducting extensive activities related to foreign direct investment. ESCWA could also make a larger contribution in the area of information and communication technology; and is exploring further cooperation in the field of statistics. In view of the importance given to World Trade Organization issues in the region, this area of cooperation is certainly one that should be further explored between OIC institutions and ESCWA.

B. United Nations Conference on Trade and Development

17. The secretariat of UNCTAD and the Islamic Development Bank have collaborated in the past in providing the necessary support to developing countries for their developmental needs. It is in this context that UNCTAD presented its "Programme of capacity-building and technical cooperation for developing countries, especially least developed countries and economies in transition in support of their participation in the World Trade Organization Doha Work Programme" to the Islamic Development Bank. The programme is demand-driven and encompasses four parts: trade, investment, trade facilitation and electronic commerce. It responds to both short and long-term needs of developing countries. The urgent need to provide assistance for the ongoing negotiations has been set in parallel with the overall capacity-building needs of the post-Doha process. The Islamic Development Bank was invited to joint efforts in the implementation of the programme and to favourably consider the possibility of supporting some of the proposals relevant to its members.

18. Since the establishment of the Al-Aqsa Fund to assist the Palestinian people, under the administration of the Islamic Development Bank, UNCTAD intensified its contacts with the secretariat of the Fund in areas of common concern. One area of special interest is trade logistics affecting food commodities, which is an area of common concern to the Islamic Development Bank, the Al Aqsa Fund and UNCTAD. The impact of the recently approved Islamic Development Bank-funded food silos project for the West Bank and Gaza could be enhanced by the provision of technical assistance to the Palestinian Authority by UNCTAD in the areas of food commodity trading and procurement, innovative trade financing mechanisms and commodity market information. This calls for renewed examination by the Bank of UNCTAD proposals in this area and for the launching

of a vigorous joint programme of technical assistance to ensure a comprehensive and coordinated response to the emerging needs of the Palestinian Authority in the area of commodity trade.

C. United Nations Population Fund

19. Since the general meeting between the United Nations and OIC secretariats in 2000, a close working relationship has been maintained and UNFPA participated in a number of OIC meetings, including the Vienna general meeting that was held in July 2002.

20. UNFPA is currently cooperating with the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (ISESCO) in a regional project entitled "Reproductive health, population education in the context of Islam". Launched in January 2000 for a duration of three years, the project aims at providing Islamic education officials, theologians, religious leaders, medical doctors, educators and jurists in the 44 ISESCO member States with the necessary reproductive health guidelines, orientations, information and skills to interpret, advocate, teach and integrate reproductive health and gender issues into their professional fields and the educational system. The project takes into account ethical aspects of population and reproductive health issues from an Islamic perspective.

21. During the general meeting of the United Nations and OIC secretariats in Vienna, UNFPA and OIC agreed to explore the possibility of jointly organizing a subregional training programme on capacity-building for conducting population census and utilization of standardized international population-based indicators for Central Asian countries.

D. Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

22. The asylum situation in the Islamic world today is marked by several protracted refugee situations. According to UNHCR 2001 statistics, the number of refugees originating from member States of the OIC amounts to some 6.5 million persons (59 per cent of the global refugee population). On the other hand, OIC member States also host some 6 million persons (50 per cent of the global refugee population). This significant proportion of persons of concern to UNHCR is indicative of why UNHCR has been seeking over the past few years to develop and intensify cooperation with OIC and its related bodies. The impact of the tragic events of 11 September 2001 on the treatment of refugees and asylum-seekers originating from OIC member States, as well as the ensuing developments in Afghanistan, have also created the space for the two institutions to further enhance their joint provision of assistance to refugees.

23. UNHCR and OIC signed a cooperation agreement in 1998 aiming to increase collaboration on humanitarian issues of mutual concern. Since then, efforts have been exerted to put into effect the provisions of the agreement, particularly with regard to exchange of information and exchange of expertise at a technical level. At the headquarters level, the High Commissioner has taken a keen interest in strengthening partnership with Islamic States through various mechanisms and channels.

24. In June 2001, the High Commissioner appointed focal points to engage Islamic and Arab States and to involve the diplomatic community of OIC member States in Geneva in recognition of the important role that Islamic States play on the international scene. Several meetings were held with the OIC Permanent Observer Mission in Geneva, individual ambassadors of OIC member States, and a wider meeting with Ambassadors of all OIC member States represented in Geneva.

25. In October 2001, the High Commissioner participated in the ninth Extraordinary Session of the Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers held in Doha, where the plight of Afghan refugees was discussed with key interlocutors. During that meeting, OIC clearly condemned acts of aggression perpetrated against civilians based on the tenets of Islam, and expressed willingness to cooperate in combating terrorism. The High Commissioner has subsequently repeatedly echoed the need to dispel the association of Islam and Muslims with terrorism.

26. In April 2002, UNHCR attended a symposium organized by OIC entitled "Human rights in Islam" held in Geneva. UNHCR closely followed discussions on the impact of the war on terror on human rights, the right to self-determination in Islam, Islam and racism, the rights of foreigners in Islamic States, the human rights of civilians in armed conflict, and the role of OIC in the field of human rights.

27. In June 2002, UNHCR participated in the twenty-ninth session of the Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers held in Khartoum, at which resolution 23/29-P on the problem of refugees in the Muslim world, was adopted. In the resolution, member States of OIC were called upon to coordinate action, at an international level, on the causes of population displacement to and from Islamic States and to strive to achieve conditions which would be conducive to their return. The Ministers also condemned all acts of repression against refugees and called upon the international community to facilitate finding durable solutions. Member States were finally called upon to secure additional resources to help alleviate the plight of refugees in Islamic States.

28. In July 2002, UNHCR participated in the general meeting between the United Nations and OIC held in Vienna. Participation at that meeting allowed for substantive discussions with the Islamic Solidarity Fund, ISESCO, and the Islamic University of Technology, and agreement was reached on various potential areas and activities for cooperation.

29. At the field level, consultations with OIC and its various subsidiary bodies continue through the UNHCR Regional Representative in Riyadh. Preparations for the High Commissioner's upcoming visit to Saudi Arabia and his meetings with the Secretary-General of OIC, the Islamic Development Bank, and the Islamic Solidarity Fund are presently under way.

E. United Nations Children's Fund

30. The OIC has been a traditional and strong advocate for children in the Islamic world and UNICEF looks forward to working with the OIC as a partner in the follow-up to the May 2002 Special Session of the General Assembly on Children.

F. World Food Programme

31. As part of its continued commitment to implement the memorandum of cooperation signed with OIC in 1999, WFP initiated contacts with the OIC secretariat and a high-level meeting was held in October 2001. It was agreed that information exchange should be intensified, particularly in the economic and food security sectors. More recently at the general meeting between the United Nations and OIC held in Vienna in July 2002, WFP and the OIC stressed the need to continue contacts and dialogue on issues of common concern at the expert and managerial levels. In the field of humanitarian relief, it was agreed that WFP would share with OIC appeals for resources, with the aim of lending its support and advocacy vis-à-vis concerned governments and donors.

32. Dialogue on cooperation between WFP and the Islamic Development Bank was intensified in 2001. As a result, WFP submitted in June 2001, on a trial basis, three small projects in Tajikistan and Pakistan for Islamic Development Bank consideration for co-financing. The projects aim at assisting rural women and young people to become self-sufficient through microcredit enterprises. WFP also proposed the signing of a memorandum of understanding that would establish a special fund to enable WFP to respond to crisis of a special nature in the Organization of the Islamic Conference member countries by procuring commodities in other member countries.

33. During the consultations at the general meeting held in Vienna, the Islamic Development Bank and WFP agreed to enhance cooperation at the field level. In this context, it was agreed that Islamic Development Bank field appraisal missions would seek to meet and coordinate with WFP country offices with the aim of identifying possible linkages and joint action on country-by-country basis. It was further agreed that, in view of the increasing demand for emergency humanitarian relief resources in Islamic Development Bank member States, a dialogue would be initiated at the expert level to explore cooperation mechanisms that would allow both organizations to respond effectively and on a timely basis to humanitarian emergencies.

34. The use of advanced information technology and tools in development and humanitarian relief planning has been identified as an important area of cooperation between the Statistical, Economic and Social Training and Research Centre for Islamic Countries and WFP. More specifically, it was agreed that training in the use of vulnerability analysis and mapping is a priority area for joint action. Owing to various constraints, however, the training did not materialize in 2001 as planned. At the Vienna 2002 consultations, both organizations reiterated the commitment to undertake the training workshop on a subregional basis, with the aim of imparting national planners with skills that would

enhance targeting, disaster mitigation and development planning.

35. WFP has agreed in principle to the signing of a memorandum of understanding with ISESCO. The proposed memorandum, which would serve to formalize relations and pave the way for joint action in the field of education, is currently under consideration by the relevant WFP authorities and a decision is expected shortly. Pending the finalization of the memorandum, ISESCO and WFP agreed at the Vienna 2002 consultations to explore the possibilities of joint training in the fields of girls' education, income-generating skills for rural women and gender mainstreaming.

36. The Islamic Solidarity Fund and WFP held their first discussions at the consultations in Vienna in 2002. It was agreed to establish contacts and exchange information on projects carried out by both organizations in the OIC member States as a first step towards identifying possible joint action and coordination. The Fund also expressed its willingness to consider supporting WFP humanitarian relief efforts in OIC member States. In view of the increasing demand for emergency humanitarian relief resources, both sides agreed to open a dialogue at the expert level to explore cooperation mechanisms that would enhance their coordinated response capacity.

G. United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East

37. The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) continues to enjoy the support of OIC in its efforts to provide essential services and humanitarian assistance to the Palestine refugees. Continuing contacts are taking place between UNRWA and the Islamic Development Bank, with a view to mobilizing additional resources for the Agency. In 2001, the Bank pledged $5 million towards UNRWA emergency operations in the occupied Palestinian territory.

H. Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

38. Throughout the reporting period, OHCHR continued to pursue its cooperative relationship and activities with OIC aimed at encouraging dialogue within and between civilizations and cultures.

39. On the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of the adoption of the Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief, OIC was invited to attend, in November 2001 in Madrid, the International Consultative Conference on School Education in relation to Freedom of Religion and Belief, Tolerance and Non-discrimination. The Conference was organized by the Special Rapporteur of the Commission on Human Rights with the assistance of OHCHR and the Government of Spain.

40. OHCHR assisted with and participated in the Symposium on "Human Rights in Islam", organized by the Organization of the Islamic Conference in March 2002 in Geneva. The High Commissioner addressed the participants. The High Commissioner, inter alia, referred to the symposium as an important contribution to promote a culture of tolerance based on respect for all human rights and respect for religious diversity.

41. During the general meeting between the United Nations and OIC, held in Vienna in July 2002, discussions were held between OHCHR and OIC on ways to enhance the cooperation between their respective subsidiary organs and specialized and affiliated institutions in a number of areas and possibilities for establishing a technical assistance cooperation programme in the field of human rights, including training of secretariat staff, joint meetings and seminars, exchange of information and documentation, mutual consultation and cooperation. In particular, OHCHR could cooperate more closely with ISESCO, with respect to human rights education activities already undertaken by OHCHR in OIC countries, at their request.

I. Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

42. FAO cooperated through its regional office for the Near East with the Statistical Economic and Social Research and Training Centre for the Islamic Countries — one of the specialized institutions of OIC in carrying out joint activities of mutual interest, which included a workshop on irrigation advisory and training services in the Near East held in Tunisia from 13 to 16 May 2002, and a training course on multidisciplinary

agricultural policy analysis organized in Bishkek from 24 June to 4 July 2002.

J. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

43. Through the past year, UNESCO continued its cooperation with OIC and its subsidiary bodies, and particularly with ISESCO, the UNESCO counterpart. Cooperation with the OIC system took different shapes: contacts at the highest level, participation in meetings of governing bodies (UNESCO and ISESCO general conferences, Islamic summits and sectoral ministerial meetings, joint commissions and contacts at the working level).

44. The Directors-General of UNESCO and of ISESCO signed in May 2002 the new programme of activities for 2002 and 2003. The programme comprises about 80 jointly financed and implemented activities in their shared areas of competence. Through the biennial meeting of their joint commission and through visits and correspondence, the two organizations continue to refine their joint cooperation to better reflect and respond to the priorities of their member States, which are also the priorities agreed upon in the general meetings between the United Nations and OIC. These are:

(a) Education and eradication of illiteracy;

(b) Development of science and technology;

(c) Human resources development and the environment.

45. In addition the two organizations jointly planned, financed and implemented activities in cultural heritage, communication and informatics (new areas assuming greater importance and relevance). The programme of activities for 2000 and 2001 included 62 projects (jointly financed and implemented) spanning the joint spheres of competence of the two organizations (education, science, culture and communication), with a clear emphasis on priority areas identified by the United Nations global conferences: eradication of poverty, basic education (especially girls' education and capacity-building), particularly in information and communication technology.

46. One area that has become a new priority in United Nations/OIC cooperation is the issue of dialogue among civilizations and cultural identity for which UNESCO and ISESCO were designated focal points. UNESCO participated in the jointly organized UNESCO/OIC/ISESCO meetings on "Dialogue among civilizations in a changing world" held in Rabat, in July 2001; the symposium on "Dialogue among civilizations: theory and practice", held in Tunis in November 2001; and the conference on Islam and cultural heritage, held in Doha, in December 2001.

K. Universal Postal Union

47. For some years now, the Universal Postal Union (UPU) has taken the initiative to establish relations with OIC by forwarding to it documentation on the development of postal services in OIC member countries and requesting, in turn, all relevant OIC documents in order to create the basis for an exchange of information, as well as specific proposals for active cooperation between the two organizations.

48. The International Bureau of UPU maintains its offer of cooperation and stands ready to establish a mechanism for sectoral consultations in the area of its competence, namely, postal services.

L. International Fund for Agricultural Development

49. The current cooperation between OIC and IFAD involves:

(a) Exchange of information and documents on questions of common interest;

(b) Periodic consultations to promote joint cooperation programmes;

(c) Reciprocal representation in conferences or meetings where questions of mutual interest are to be discussed.

M. United Nations Industrial Development Organization

50. During the reporting period UNIDO organized training programmes for officers of the Islamic Development Bank to strengthen capacities in investment, project identification and appraisal,

according to UNIDO methodology and tools in this field.

51. UNIDO provided a contribution on its experience in Islamic countries in the field of environmental issues and cleaner production centres. This contribution was requested by the OIC secretariat for the first meeting of Islamic Ministers of Environment, held in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, in June 2002.

52. As a follow-up to the general meeting between the United Nations and OIC held in Vienna, UNIDO will pursue and further develop the cooperation with selected OIC institutions to achieve the following objectives: private sector meetings and investment for seminars on trade; concluding a multi-agency agreement for the implementation of a pilot programme geared to capacity-building, policy advice, investors matchmaking in targeted OIC countries (UNIDO, Islamic Corporation for Insurance of Investment and Export Credit, Islamic Development Bank); conducting training programmes geared to enterprise creation and entrepreneurship development (UNIDO, Islamic Chamber of Commerce and Industry); organizing a joint workshop to explore the possibilities of establishing a regional production centre to be based in Bahrain (UNIDO, Islamic Development Bank, United Nations Environment Programme); implementing a regional project to secure the sound preservation and promotion of traditional crafts of OIC member countries (UNIDO, Research Centre for Islamic History, Art and Culture).